Healthy Forests Report

June 7, 2006

The Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service implement the National Fire Plan (NFP) and Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) in order to help save the lives of firefighters and citizens and to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to our communities, forests, and rangelands.

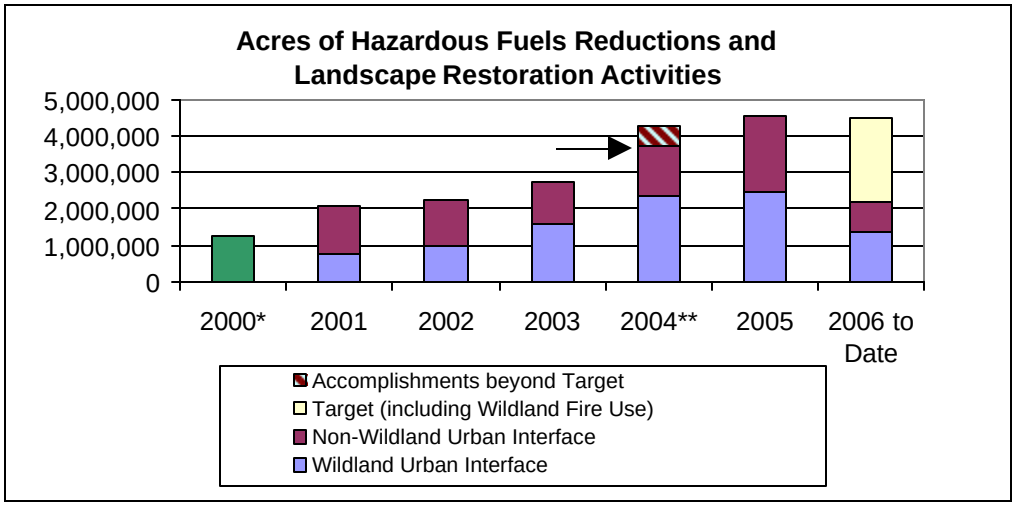
HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION & LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROJECTS

An excessive accumulation of hazardous or unusually flammable fuels in our forests, woodlands, and grasslands is the root cause of the unprecedented fire risk facing our public lands. Land managers remove hazardous fuels via programs funded specifically for that purpose and in other programs whose principle goal is the achievement of a variety of resource management objectives that can be broadly labeled landscape restoration. Treatments occur both inside and outside the wildland urban interface (WUI).

1. Inside the WUI treatments reduce fuels around homes, communities, and resources to slow or stop wildland fires from threatening these high-value areas.

2. Beyond the WUI, treatments not only help protect communities by creating conditions that enable firefighters to more successfully suppress fires before they enter the WUI but also reduce fire severity and its impact on valued landscapes and natural resources.

Under Healthy Forests Initiative and the National Fire Plan, the Federal land management agencies have treated over 15 million acres of federal lands since 2000. These treatments have contributed to the reduced threat of catastrophic wildland fire.



* FY 2000 is used as a baseline for reporting, as the NFP was implemented in FY 2001. Treatment location was not included in reporting prior to FY 2001.

** Acres treated under landscape restoration activities were not reported prior to FY 2004.

Table 1: Hazardous Fuels & Landscape Restoration Activities, FY 2006 *(as of 6/6/06)*

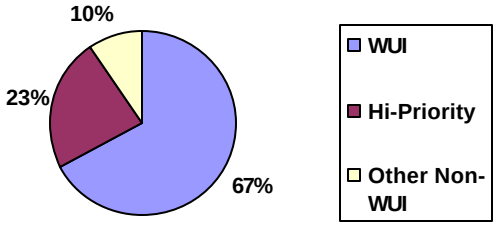
	Hazardous Fuels Appropriations		Landscape Restoration Appropriations		
Treatment Type	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**TOTAL**
Forest Service	922,723	214,500	120,779	217,185	**1,475,187**
DOI	454,352	198,410	16,857	26,883	**696,502**
TOTAL	**1,377,075**	**412,910**	**137,636**	**244,068**	**2,171,689**

Note: Total does not include acres treated by Wildland Fire Use on Forest Service Lands or acres treated with State Fire Assistance funding.

Hazardous Fuels and Landscape Restoration Priorities

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior design hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities to meet one of three objectives:

1. Directly reduce wildfire threats within the wildland urban interface.
2. Treat areas outside of the wildland-urban interface (non-WUI) that are at greatest risk of catastrophic wildland fire. These *high priority non-WUI treatments* reduce the risk of unwanted fire to natural resources, achieve other natural resource management objectives, and, in some cases also serve to protect WUI areas.



3. Maintain desired landscape conditions achieved through previous treatments outside the WUI in order to retain the associated benefits.

HEALTHY FORESTS AUTHORITIES

Implementation of activities under the HFI and HFRA authorities can be summarized as a three-step process:

1. NEPA Planning and Decisions – Activities that will require NEPA Decisions are identified (this generally occurs up to 3 years prior to actual project implementation). The planning is typically broad in scope, and may include multiple treatments.
2. Analysis and Preparation – Project preparation and design generally occur in the year prior to implementation. Project scope, location and treatment type are refined.
3. Treatment Planning and Accomplishment – Final planning and implementation occur.

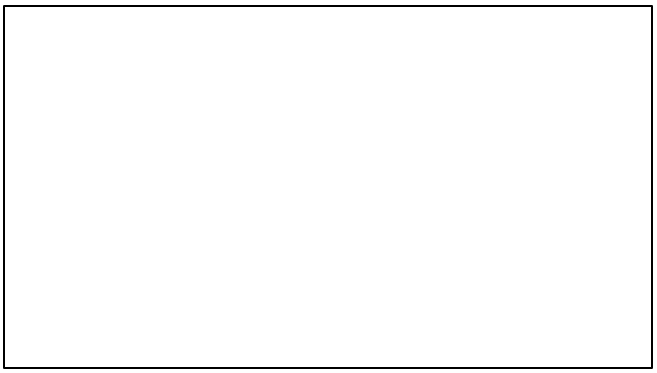
Table 2: Healthy Forests Activities, FY 2006

Treatments Planned	Treatments Completed	Acres Planned	HFI/HFRA Acres Completed
2,420	1,003	520,248	203,859

UTILIZATION OF FOREST BYPRODUCTS

Byproducts removed during hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities are often utilized in certain forest products (e.g., timber, engineered lumber, paper and pulp, furniture) and bio-energy and bio-based products (e.g., plastics, ethanol, and diesel). To date, the Forest Service and DOI have treated 534,463 acres mechanically; of these, 41% have included biomass utilization.

Biomass Utilization from All Mechanically Treated Acres



STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS AWARDED

Stewardship contracting includes natural resource management activities that improve land conditions. These projects shift the focus of federal forest and rangeland management towards a desired future resource condition. They are also a means for federal agencies to contribute to the development of sustainable rural communities, maintain healthy forest ecosystems, and provide a continuing source of local income and employment.

Table 3: Stewardship Contracts & Agreements

	Bureau of Land Management		**Forest Service**	
2003	2 contracts	300 acres	50 contracts	14,000 acres
2004	22 contracts	15,000 acres	64 contracts	42,000 acres
2005	58 contracts awarded	15,000 acres	44 contracts	35,500 acres
2006	7 contracts awarded	6,043 acres	37 contracts	23,000 acres
Total	**284 contracts / agreements for 150,843 acres***			

*Not all projects in table above were authorized under HFRA.

HFRA TITLE IV: APPLIED RESEARCH

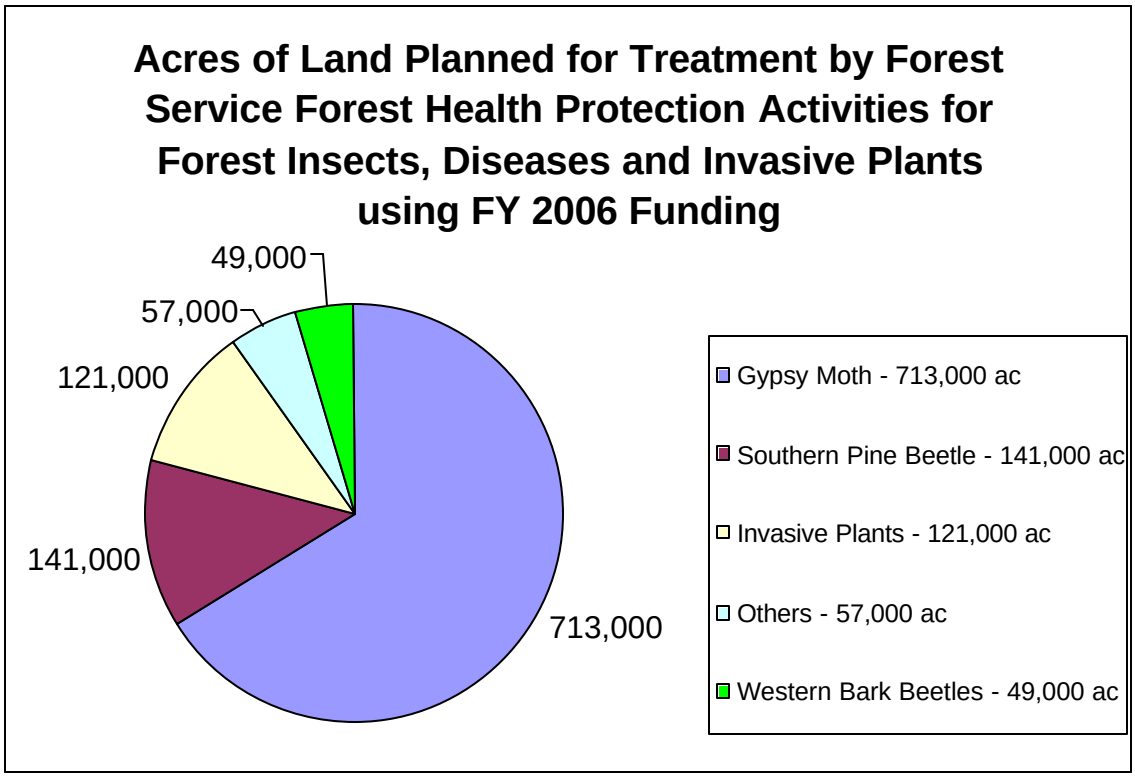
The Forest Service's applied research projects, in partnership with several universities and state forestry agencies, aim to conduct and evaluate different land management practices that reduce problems associated with the current outbreaks of insects and diseases and to translate that information for practicing professionals, landowners, and the public.

There are currently 6 Silvicultural Assessment and 6 Accelerated Information Gathering projects planned or underway. For more information of the Forest Service's Applied Research Projects under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, please visit:

http://www.healthyforests.gov/applied_research/index.html

INVASIVE SPECIES AND FOREST HEALTH

In FY 2006, Forest Service Forest Health Protection activities include both prevention and suppression efforts and provided resources to restore lands impacted by native and nonnative forest pests on federal, state and private lands. Some of the nonnative pests addressed included: hemlock woolly adelgid, white pine blister rust, gypsy moth, sudden oak death, emerald ash borer, Asian long horned beetle, European wood wasp, cycad scale, wiliwili gall wasp and invasive plants. Over one million acres are planned to be treated as a result of Forest Health Protection efforts funded in FY 2006.



Though various nonnative species are being treated, the only data currently available regarding accomplishment are for gypsy moth where over 137,033 acres have been treated.

All projects planned for southern pine beetle and most for western bark beetles improve condition class. Nearly 141,000 acres for southern pine beetle and 33,000 acres for western bark beetles are proposed for thinning, planting, sanitation or site preparation treatments on state, private, and federal lands. These treatments improve condition class. To date, over 123,229 acres have been reported accomplished for southern pine beetle and 4,658 acres for western bark beetles.

FOREST SERVICE USE OF THE ESA COUNTERPART REGULATIONS

Since the training module on procedures, the Section 7 consultation standards of review, and monitoring was prepared in May, 2004, over 250 Forest Service line officers, and over 500 biologists have both taken the training and been certified to use the regulations. Through February, 2005, over 50 NFP projects had used the process, and the amount of use since then will be known in March, 2006. The one-year evaluation of counterpart regulation use is ongoing, and results of that will be used to make any needed improvements in the use of this important tool.

HEALTHY FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

South Carolina's Fire Hazard Mitigation Program

South Carolina is a state blessed with tremendous ecological diversity, but is also prone to serious fire threats. South Carolina is experiencing tremendous population growth, which increases the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and puts homes at an increased risk from wildfire. The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) has jurisdiction and responsibility for fire prevention and suppression on 13.6 million acres of state and private land. The five year average fire occurrence is over 3,800 fires per year that burn more than 24,000 acres.

The SCFC has an aggressive program for dealing with hazard mitigation and fire prevention in the WUI areas. Each of the state's three regions has a WUI Coordinator. Several years ago South Carolina began a systematic process of identifying high fire occurrence areas. Next, Wildfire Risk Assessments were conducted and those neighborhoods which rated high or very high scheduled hazard reduction plans and projects using National Fire Plan funds. Some plans were developed prior to Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) criteria establishment. However, these early plans have been revised to ensure they have all of the components of CWPPs. To date, 69 CWPPs have been completed.

The CWPPs recommend numerous fuel reduction and mitigation activities to engage communities. Two communities have been designated FIREWISE Communities USA in South Carolina. The SCFC is also working with a developer in the coastal area of South Carolina who has agreed to incorporate wildfire mitigation principles into a new development that is scheduled for construction this summer.

Woody Biomass Utilization Grants Awarded

Nearly $4.2 million in Woody Biomass Utilization grants have been awarded to 18 small enterprises to develop innovative uses for woody biomass in national forests as sources of renewable energy and new products.

This year's recipients were selected by Forest Service representatives based on a number of factors, including those that make it economical to remove woody biomass from forest lands and turning it into marketable products, while reducing the costs of recovery. In addition,

grants were awarded for projects targeted at removing economic and market barriers in using small-diameter trees and woody biomass.

Agriculture Under Secretary Thomas Door said that "This grant program helps to reduce the risk of wildfires by removing built-up fuel hazards and improves forest health," during his announcement of the grant recipients in Missoula, Montana on April 24, 2006.

All 18 grant recipients must match the federal portion by at least 20 percent. Together with the non-federal matches, approximately $13 million will be spent on this effort.

For more information on the grant program, visit http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us/tmu/grant/biomass-grant.html.